TRANSMITTER
LITERARY EDITION

Number 9 ROWHER RELOCATION CENTER, ARKANSAS November 28, 1943

REASONS FOR THANKSGIVING

I. The History of Thanksgiving:

Thanksgiving Festivals are among the oldest in history. People have given thanks for victory, for rainfall, for the return of spring, and for abundant harvests. Ceremonies accompanying these occasions of rejoicing have varied from crude and cruel sacrifices to penitent prayer.

The origin and development of Thanksgiving in America is fairly well known. The early Pilgrims at Plymouth met in October, 1621, three hundred and twenty two years ago, and feasted on wild turkey, fish, vegetables, and corn bread, having as guests the neighboring Indians and their Chief Massasoit. There is no proof that even a prayer was offered as evidence of reverence. One year later, however, when drought had blasted their crops and starvation threatened their very existance there came to their shore at last a food-laden ship from Europe. Then they met for Thanksgiving and prayer, but there is no mention of feasting.

Thanksgiving services were held some years and in some communities until the establishment of a Federal Government. In 1789 George Washington appointed a day, October 26, as Thanksgiving. However, the nation did not adopt a general Thanksgiving Day until Abraham Lincoln in 1864 set aside the last Thursday in November with a solemn proclamation. Every president except one since the time of Lincoln has proclaimed this day as Thanksgiving.

II. Shall we Feast with Thanksgiving?

In the United States Thanksgiving has become a day for feasting, while some have met to give thanks to God for filling our land with abundance. This year it ought to be difficult for Christians, and for other people of compassion, to gorge themselves with food. Our country is party to the crime of starving Dutch and Belgian children in the fear that the German people may seize some of the good. We are thus letting children die who want to live--who want to live democratically and free.

A major reason why we cannot feast and flaunt our abundance is that more than half of the people in the world are hungry. A reliable authority has reported that in Burma alone ninety million people live on less than a penny a day each. In much of Asia people who eat today will have no fund tomorrow. Newly enrolled children in mission schools have expressed surprise at being fed twice in one day. In fact our papers tell of hundreds of thousands being slain in battle--machine-gunned from the ground, bombed from the sky, sunk by subs in the sea--casualty lists now running into the millions. It is most certain, however, that more people will die of starvation during this war than soldiers will kill. Let us not then be thankful for abundant food, but for sympathy and courage which will some day enable mankind to produce and distribute adequate food everywhere.

George Washington issued the first Presidential Thanksgiving Proclamation because of a military victory. That was appropriate, for peace was nearer. But I am unable to wax enthusiastic over military victories on a Thanksgiving Day. A smashing victory on the one side and a crushing defeat on the other leads to a period of stupid muddling. In one country the militarists enjoy inflated importance while in the other country humiliation and desire for revenge raise up a new generation of militarists. Thus the peace is lost. This truth was spoken by Woodrow Wilson twenty six years ago. It was crushed to earth then, but it is destined to rise and guide mankind toward peace.

III. For What then shall we Give Thanks?

We should give thanks for Christ. Has anyone tried to think how poor the world would be without Him? He was willing to stake His life on the proposition that a permanent society of joy and peace could be built on trust in the good in others, even in foreigners and foes. He is the standard by which conduct is coming to be judged everywhere. His conception of society as a Brotherhood, an extension of the family, is not only fine but final, and his

Golden Rule is the way to its attainment. His picture of God as a Good Father is understandable, and if true, makes immortality sure --- Fathers do not disappoint their children, do not let them keep hoping for gifts which cannot be provided. Jesus is the only character in history who judges all conduct and challenge all ages. In His presence the nations will continue to look cowardly until they catch His courage. They will continue to kill until they are willing to die without killing in order that good will may be always demonstrated and never denied. He stated one day: "He that gathereth not with me scattereth". It is true. He is the center around whom society will gather in a brotherhood of purity, peace, and plenty.

We can give thanks for the church. We should think of it not as an institution but as a movement, by far the most significant movement that has ever called together people in different lands and ages. It is so important that people who understand its significance are anointed or baptized into its membership. It prods our consciences; it digs around the roots of our motives; it teaches our children the truths which the ages have vindicated; it has led in the establishing of hospitals, charity, and education; it inspires us to worship, to sing of brotherhood and justice, and to work for peace.

The greatest single achievement wrought by men during the past eighty years has been done by the church, and without large gifts. It was my privilege to teach university courses in International Relations and kindred subjects for twelve years. We studied the achievements of ambassies and state departments as they sought to promote peace and understanding, and often the achievements have been memorable. But out of these years of study has grown a conviction that the church through its missionary enterprise has laid a foundation for world peace which the centuries will rightly appraise. Missionaries have made friends, have created in literally millions of people faith in us, faith in God, faith in peace and in a world organized for peace. This body of good will is the foundation on which world peace will be laid. Wholly aside from religion, this is by far the most important single thing that has been done in the world during the past century. Therefore, anyone who has had a part in making the church strong anywhere in the world can stand up and say with pride:"I have had a part in the most important task that has been achieved in my generation."

We can be thankful for an attitude toward life which does not permit failure. A Christian is one who dies what ought to be done in the world to advance justice, truth, and good will no matter what the cost to himself. He does not have to appear successful, for that word does not belong in the Lord's vocabulary. Faithfulness is His word. We can always stand for truth, for justice, for love, and know that we are a part of the power which sustains the stars, creates life, and determines the destiny of all things. Nothing can sever us from this power except our own will to ignore it, neither trouble nor persecution, nor famine nor nakedness nor war nor evacuation --nothing can keep us from being strong and dignified, from continuing to have good will, to work for the happiness of others; nothing can keep us from using hardships and injustices as incentives to nobler efforts and ideals.

It is well to remember that the Mormons turned a tragic persecution into a noble achievement; that Paul and John Bunyan had to write from jail ; that the Hebrew Bible was assembled in a war evacuation camp. I am confident that many of the great saints of the future are prisoners today. I am sure that some of the suffering victims of this war-maybe Noru, maybe Nimoller, maybe some American citizen in an evacuation center, will write a chapter in the history of human justice and democracy which will outlast the report from any battlefield.

The world seems to be covered with a flood of anger, falsehood, and hate, but the heart of man is not wholly corrupted. Time will not only bring the return of soldiers, but also the return of sanity and songs of thanksgiving.

Some years ago I traveled westward from New Orleans over eighty or ninety miles of black and whirling flood water as it pushed its angry way toward the open sea. Four months later I passed that way again. The flood waters were gone. From the good earth had come forth grass and wild flowers, and every tree and shrub was heavy with foliage which the autumn frost had tinged with gold and brown -- the achievement of God through nature in a brief four months of time. --- Some day the angry flood tide of war will come with wasted strength to the end of its way. In its wake will arise millions of men and women thankful for peace and resolved to live and plan and work for peace.

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THANKSGIVING DAY THOUGHTS

Even in this tragic year we can be thankful. The finest and clearest things in the world cannot be touched by war, misfortune, sickness or even death. We should be grateful for the challenge that comes to us today to restudy the problem of human relationships and world peace. In this troubled world we can be thankful for and pray for penitence, new and larger vision, sympathy and courage. We should thank God that He is still giving us the time in which and the materials with which to build a better world, if we have the will to do so. We are being tried in the fire, and we shall come out true gold if we stand the test.---The Biblical Recorder.

THANKSGIVINGS

I humbly kneel and give Thee thanks, O Lord,
For strength to till my little rocky field;
For all the blessings that Thy love has poured
Upon me in the harvest's mystic yield;
For calm and storm; for sun and snow and rain;
For dawning's clarion; for weary dusk;
For hope that ever leans to solace pain;
For dewy gardens sweet with myrrh and musk;
But most of all for faith that steels my soul
Against each mocking doubt, that lifts and leers
Across the dark, and makes me see my goal
Beyond the anguish of these fleeting years,
A shinning glory in whose splendor gleams
Fulfillment, Lord, of all my cherished dreams.

Edgar Daniel Kramer

IT IS A GOOD THING TO GIVE THANKS

As the sun lowers toward the western horizon, its reflecting rays beam on the forest around us. The beautiful disply of red, orange and brown has been painted on the leaves, and the accompaniment of the brisk wind, these golden-colored leaves sail through the air and will soon leave the trees bare.

Outside of our center, cotton pickers wearing their red kerchiefs and dragging their white bags are soon no more. The continuous "chug-chug" sound from nearby Rohwer reminds us that the cotton-gin is at work.

As we survey our 600-acre camp farm, we meet Jack Frost and he confides in us saying, "I've helped myself to your vegetable garden and I've bit everything but you can have the daikon (icicle radishes).

All of this makes us realize that autumn is here. The sharp tinge of the north wind has just struck us. At this season, wherever we are, it is a good thing to give thanks.

I am thankful this year for the courageous American Japanese who have relocated and have taken their proper place in normal American society. Yours have the adventure and struggle because you have been pioneers in your field. You went out with faith in God and your fellow of a brand new environment. You were an optimist. Yours have been the task of winning the respect of your community and fellow students or workers and bridging the gap of understanding. My friends, I say to you, "Keep up the good work and don't forget that you are representing the rest of uswherever you are."

Then, I am thankful to our many American friends on the outside. Your cheerful letters, your generous material contributions, your personal visits and your prayers have been a constant source of encouragement and an inspiration to us. You have leaped over the bounds of local community interest and have encompassed the broad and friendly vision of brotherhood. one of our powerful foces that build morale is the realization that there are friends who care.

And above all, I am thankful to God for Jesus, our Saviour. there is not an iota of danger that wartime observance of Thanksgiving will become a mere formality when we preach and teach that Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Christ is the anchor of our faith, hope and love for all ages. The redeeming message of Christ is not affected by the state of world affairs. Ours, instead, is the privilege and task of transforming the sick condition of the world by first changing the hearts of men.

K. Harper Sakauo